

# DAILY BULLETIN

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## RICE URGES BURMESE GOVERNMENT TO BEGIN DIALOGUE ON DEMOCRACY

Secretary marks anniversary of 1990 multiparty elections

Washington -- Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called on the government of Burma to return the country to democracy in a May 29 statement commemorating the 16th anniversary of Burma's thwarted 1990 multiparty elections.

"The past 16 years have been tragic ones for the Burmese people," the secretary said in the videotaped statement, which was broadcast on the Voice of America. "Yet their spirit has not been broken, their courage has not waned, and their peaceful desire for liberty, dignity, and prosperity remains stronger than the forces of tyranny."

The National League for Democracy (NLD), Burma's leading democratic opposition party, won a landslide victory in the elections, capturing more than 81 percent of the vote and 392 out of 485 parliamentary seats.

But Burma's ruling military regime, now known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), refused to cede power. In ensuing years, it has engaged in a campaign of repression, imprisoning political opposition figures and targeting ethnic minority groups.

"The National League for Democracy and other opposition groups have demonstrated in good faith that they are willing to begin a real dialogue for peace and for national reconciliation," Rice said.

"It is time for the Burmese government to reciprocate. If the regime takes positive steps, I am confident that the international community will respond."

#### DETENTION OF AUNG SAN SUU KYI

Rice also noted that May 30 marks the third anniversary of a government-backed attack on a convoy of NLD members and supporters near Depayin in northern Burma.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the NLD, has been held under house arrest since that incident, despite international pressure for her release. Suu Kyi has been in detention for more than 10 of the last 17 years.

"We call for the immediate and unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience, including Aung San Suu Kyi," Rice said. She urged the Burmese government to investigate fully the 2003 assault and arrest those who were responsible.

Observers had hoped that the SPDC would release Suu Kyi when her detention order expired May 27. She was allowed to meet with the United Nations' under secretary-general for political affairs, Ibrahim Gambari, on May 20 -- her first such visit by a foreign diplomat since March 2004.

But despite a personal appeal from U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan on May 26, the junta decided to extend the NLD leader's detention for another year.

In her statement, Rice expressed solidarity with the democratic aspirations of the people of Burma and reiterated the United States' support.

"Your dream of democracy is not forgotten, nor is it yours to bear alone," she said. "America stands with you. We remain with you as your dedicated partner and we will work to hasten the coming of days when you will once again live in freedom, peace, and prosperity."

For more information on U.S. policies, see U.S. Support for Democracy in Burma:  
[http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/east\\_asia\\_pacific/burma.html](http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/east_asia_pacific/burma.html)

#### STATE'S YAMAMOTO CONCLUDES "VERY POSITIVE" TALKS IN ETHIOPIA

Border conflict with Eritrea, political, economic reforms focus of talks

By Jim Fisher-Thompson  
Washington File Correspondent

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Donald Yamamoto ended a two-day visit to Ethiopia May 29 that included "very positive" talks with the Ethiopian government on settling the border dispute with Eritrea and on political and economic reforms.

"We've made a tremendous amount of progress," Yamamoto said following meetings with Ethiopian Prime Minister Zenawi Meles and other senior officials.

The U.S. official later left Ethiopia for Chad for meetings that will focus on efforts to establish "a political space for the opposition and to really help President [Idriss] Deby and the opposition parties cooperate more," Yamamoto told the Washington File.

Chad will be the diplomat's final stop on a tour that included a May 26-28 visit to Kigali, Rwanda, to facilitate talks called the Tripartite peace process in which four Great Lakes nations reached agreement on sharing intelligence on rebel movements and on a list of warlords for sanctioning.

In Addis Ababa, the diplomat said, "We talked about bilateral relationships; the continuing issue of the Ethiopian-Eritrean border [dispute] -- on how to achieve permanent peace and secure safe and permanent demarcation of the border. The emphasis was peace."

Yamamoto, a former U.S. ambassador to Djibouti, said he did not meet with members of the political opposition on this trip. "But, we discussed that with the government and our position is that we are still continuing to work with the government on political and economic reform issues. Those are the two critical areas -- and the government was very receptive."

#### DEVELOPMENT AND AIDS RELIEF

In the critical area of development and economic assistance, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has spent more than \$3 billion in Ethiopia

since the 1960s, including \$2.5 billion in food aid. In 2006, USAID is devoting more than \$50 million toward development, including \$5.5 million for democracy and good governance programs.

On another important front, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) devoted about \$80 million for HIV/AIDS prevention and care programs in Ethiopia in 2005 and will continue to support the Ethiopian people in their battle against the disease. Announced in 2003, the five-year, \$15 billion initiative to turn the tide in combating the global HIV/AIDS pandemic is providing funds to fight the disease, with a special focus on 15 hardest-hit countries. The United States is spending another \$100 million through PEPFAR in 2006, U.S. Deputy Chief of Mission Janet Wilgus told the Washington File.

The AIDS prevalence rate in Ethiopia is around 5 percent, she added, but "they have a new demographic health survey coming out soon that might show it's a little bit lower than that."

According to Wilgus, "One of the important things PEPFAR is doing in Ethiopia is shoring up the whole infrastructure of the health system so that you can do prevention and treatment on the most effective basis. That means upgrading hospitals, health centers and training community health workers."

Asked if the Peace Corps might return to Ethiopia, Wilgus, a former volunteer herself, said, "We would love it." She said volunteers, who live and work at the village level in a number of African countries, would be especially effective in helping change attitudes as part of the U.S. government's emphasis on "transformational diplomacy."

## COOPERATING AGAINST TERRORISM

On Ethiopia's role in the global war on terrorism, Wilgus said, "We have excellent cooperation and we work to maintain that; notwithstanding some of the other differences we may have" on political and economic matters.

The Ethiopian government, she said, has military officers coordinating with the U.S. regional task force stationed at Djibouti and with CENTCOM, the main U.S. military regional command headquartered in Florida that oversees U.S. counterterrorist operations in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as in the Horn of Africa.

In April, Ethiopia was praised for its cooperative efforts on the War on Terror in the State Department's Country Reports on Terrorism. In the past year, according to the report, "Ethiopia devoted high-level attention to the fight against terrorism and continued its counterterrorism cooperation with the United States.

"As evidence of its political will to fight terrorism," the report continued, "the Government of Ethiopia agreed to a number of new initiatives and continued to cooperate in efforts to collect and share intelligence on terrorist groups. Draft counterterrorism legislation is currently before Parliament for approval."

Other points of cooperation, the terrorism report said, include accommodating requests for arrest warrants of suspected terrorists, passing laws to outlaw money laundering and several other financial crimes and active participation in African Union and Intergovernmental Authority on Development counterterrorism efforts.

For additional information on U.S. policy in the region, see Africa:  
<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/#latest>

## FOURTEENTH ROUND OF TRIPARTITE TALKS CONCLUDE POSITIVELY

Progress made on Fusion Cell operation, list of sanctioned groups and leaders

By Jim Fisher-Thompson  
Washington File Special Correspondent

Kigali, Rwanda -- Conflict resolution talks aimed at curbing the movements of rebel forces in the Great Lakes region concluded May 27 with agreement on a number of issues, including enhancing information-gathering and formalizing a "wanted list" of individuals and groups subject to travel restrictions and asset sanctions.

Rwanda's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region Richard Sezibera briefed journalists following the two-day session of the Tripartite Plus Joint Commission (TJC) Subcommission on Security and Defense describing it as, "a very productive meeting."

Sezibera, a former Rwandan ambassador to the United States, addressed reporters and close to 30 delegates from Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda in the conference hall of the Des Mille Collines. Several observers from the United Nations and the MONUC peacekeeping force in DRC also attended the two-day talks. The Kigali meeting was the 14th in a conflict-resolution process that began more than two years ago with help from then Secretary of State Colin Powell. The process has been facilitated by a team of U.S. diplomats led by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Donald Yamamoto, who has traveled to Kigali seven times to attend Tripartite meetings.

In a speech he gave to United Nations in January, the former U.S. ambassador to Djibouti said, "We deplore the violence and condemn the hostilities of the FDLR, the LRA and FNL [Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, Lord's Resistance Army and National Liberation Front] and other negative forces and militias operating in the Great Lakes region."

Militias like the FDLR, whose leaders were involved in the genocide in Rwanda, depend on young recruits, many of whom are just hostages taken by force from refugee camps and their villages. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer outlined the problem when she spoke to the press during a visit to Rwanda in April. Frazer described visiting a refugee camp in eastern Congo where she "had the chance to talk extensively to some of the young soldiers who were part of the FDLR; they spoke about being held hostage there by the FDLR leaders. And that they were being shot when they tried to reach MONUC positions for repatriation home."

In Kigali, Ambassador Sezibera declared the latest round of talks "very productive."

He said, "We have put into place operational procedures to make the Fusion Cell more effective both as a conduit for information we share on armed groups and also to enable it to analyze this information even more effectively."

The Fusion Cell is a jointly operated data-gathering and analysis operation in eastern Congo meant to keep track of the movements of militias and verify or deny reports of cross-border violations.

Sezibera also said, "We have agreed on lists of individuals who are leaders of the armed groups operating in the

region. This list will be transmitted to the Ministers of the Tripartite Plus countries for approval and submission to the African Union and United Nations."

He added that delegates to the meeting "agreed or reaffirmed on the measures to take against sanctioned individuals and groups that have been put on the sanctions list and we have agreed on what measures to take against them."

"We have reaffirmed the need to impose travel bans on them; freeze their assets; restrict them from having fund-raising activities on our territories and limit, in the manner that we can, their mobilizing activities including through the media."

Sezibera concluded by thanking the United States for facilitating the Tripartite process and the four member nations for "the spirit of cooperation that has characterized the work of the Subcommission."

Yamamoto also remarked on the spirit of cooperation the Tripartite process seems to have engendered. "I think we've built up a good feeling of trust and confidence with each other in the talks. We share information about each other's families for example. And because of that there's a lot more commitment to getting things done now." Speed is important now, he added, because "every day rebels operating in the region kill 1,000 people. So, you have to be serious about them; you have to apply a lot of pressure. It's not acceptable to have these negative forces running around killing people."

#### SCIENTISTS REPORT RECOVERY OF IRAQ MARSHES UNDER WAY

Species returning to restored marshes destroyed by Saddam Hussein regime

Washington – Since 2003, restoration of Iraq's destroyed Mesopotamian marshes has resulted in a "remarkable rate of reestablishment" of native plants, fish, birds and other life forms, according to an article in the June issue of the journal *BioScience*.

With funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, Curtis Richardson of Duke University in North Carolina and Najah Hussain of the University of

Basrah in Iraq, wrote about fieldwork they conducted over the past two years in four large marshes in southern Iraq, according to a May 30 press release from the American Institute of Biological Sciences.

Many consider Iraq's Mesopotamian marshes to have been the cradle of Western civilization. The word Mesopotamia means "between rivers," referring to its location between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

The marshes were once the largest wetlands in southwest Asia and covered more than 15,000 square kilometers. After a systematic effort by Saddam Hussein's regime to ditch, dike and drain the marshes of southern Iraq, less than 10 percent of the area remained as functioning marshland by 2000.

The marshes also once were famous for their biodiversity and cultural richness. They were the permanent habitat for millions of birds and a flyway for millions more migrating between Siberia and Africa.

The loss of the ecologically critical wetlands was of special concern because they were once home to 300,000 to 500,000 indigenous Marsh Arabs, tens of thousands of whom fled to southern Iran. Most of the refugees had returned to Iraq by the end of 2004, but they found few viable marshes remaining.

In the latest study, Richardson and Hussain found that water flow into the Iraq marshes from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers has been greater than expected because of record snowpack melts, which has kept salt levels low.

The incoming water quality also has been better than predicted, with toxin levels lower than scientists had feared.

As a result, the researchers say, many native species have returned, including some rare bird species, although their numbers have not rebounded to historical levels.

U.S. scientists undertook a first assessment of the status of the marshes in June 2003. They found massive but uncoordinated reflooding – local farmers had begun blowing up dikes and dams after Saddam's regime collapsed in 2003 – and noted some re-establishment of native plants.

After monitoring the marshes in collaboration with Iraqi scientists, Richardson and Hussain reported that 39 percent of the former extent of the marshes had been reflooded by September 2005.

Despite incomplete data, the researchers found that in many respects the restored marshes they studied were functioning at levels close to those in one marsh that had not been drained.

The fast recovery of plant production, overall good water quality and rapid restoration of most wetland functions seem to indicate that the recovery of ecosystem function is well under way.

But the researchers point out that water inflow is unlikely to be sufficient to maintain the encouraging trends in coming years.

Fish catches are still poor, deterring many Marsh Arabs from returning to a traditional way of life.

More research is needed -- but is not being done, say Richardson and Hussain -- to determine how the marshes and agriculture can share water, identify sites of toxins and study insecticide use by local fishermen.

**Pleases Note:** Most texts and transcript mentioned in the U.S. Mission Daily Bulletin are available via our homepage: <http://geneva.usmission.gov/>

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